



UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
United States Patent and Trademark Office
Address: COMMISSIONER FOR PATENTS
P.O. Box 1450
Alexandria, Virginia 22313-1450
www.uspto.gov

APPLICATION NO.	FILING DATE	FIRST NAMED INVENTOR	ATTORNEY DOCKET NO.	CONFIRMATION NO.
10/017,311	10/30/2001	Jeffery O. Burrell	60027.0051US01	7213
39262	7590	12/28/2005	EXAMINER	
BELLSOUTH CORPORATION P.O. BOX 2903 MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55402-0903			O'CONNOR, GERALD J	
		ART UNIT		PAPER NUMBER
				3627

DATE MAILED: 12/28/2005

Please find below and/or attached an Office communication concerning this application or proceeding.

Office Action Summary	Application No.	Applicant(s)	
	10/017,311	Burrell et al.	
	Examiner	Art Unit	
	O'Connor	3627	

-- The MAILING DATE of this communication appears on the cover sheet with the correspondence address --

Period for Reply

A SHORTENED STATUTORY PERIOD FOR REPLY IS SET TO EXPIRE THREE MONTH(S) FROM THE MAILING DATE OF THIS COMMUNICATION.

- Extensions of time may be available under the provisions of 37 CFR 1.136(a). In no event, however, may a reply be timely filed after SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- If the period for reply specified above is less than thirty (30) days, a reply within the statutory minimum of thirty (30) days will be considered timely.
- If NO period for reply is specified above, the maximum statutory period will apply and will expire SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- Failure to reply within the set or extended period for reply will, by statute, cause the application to become ABANDONED (35 U.S.C. § 133). Any reply received by the Office later than three months after the mailing date of this communication, even if timely filed, may reduce any earned patent term adjustment. See 37 CFR 1.704(b).

Status

- 1) Responsive to communication(s) filed on September 26, 2005.
- 2a) This action is FINAL. 2b) This action is non-final.
- 3) Since this application is in condition for allowance except for formal matters, prosecution as to the merits is closed in accordance with the practice under *Ex parte Quayle*, 1935 C.D. 11, 453 O.G. 213.

Disposition of Claims

- 4) Claim(s) 1 and 4-26 is/are pending in the application.
- 4a) Of the above claim(s) none is/are withdrawn from consideration.
- 5) Claim(s) _____ is/are allowed.
- 6) Claim(s) 1 and 4-26 is/are rejected.
- 7) Claim(s) _____ is/are objected to.
- 8) Claim(s) _____ are subject to restriction and/or election requirement.

Application Papers

- 9) The specification is objected to by the Examiner.
- 10) The drawing(s) filed on October 30, 2001 is/are: a) accepted or b) objected to by the Examiner.
Applicant may not request that any objection to the drawing(s) be held in abeyance. See 37 CFR 1.85(a).
Replacement drawing sheet(s) including the correction is required if the drawing(s) is objected to. See 37 CFR 1.121(d).
- 11) The oath or declaration is objected to by the Examiner. Note the attached Office Action or form PTO-152.

Priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119

- 12) Acknowledgment is made of a claim for foreign priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(a)-(d) or (f).
- a) All b) Some * c) None of:
 1. Certified copies of the priority documents have been received.
 2. Certified copies of the priority documents have been received in Application No. _____.
 3. Copies of the certified copies of the priority documents have been received in this National Stage application from the International Bureau (PCT Rule 17.2(a)).

* See the attached detailed Office action for a list of the certified copies not received.

Attachment(s)

1) <input type="checkbox"/> Notice of References Cited (PTO-892)	4) <input type="checkbox"/> Interview Summary (PTO-413)
2) <input type="checkbox"/> Notice of Draftsperson's Patent Drawing Review (PTO-948)	Paper No(s)/Mail Date: _____
3) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Information Disclosure Statement(s) (PTO-1449 or PTO/SB/08) Paper No(s)/Mail Date <u>20050926</u>	5) <input type="checkbox"/> Notice of Informal Patent Application (PTO-152)
	6) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____

DETAILED ACTION

Continued Examination Under 37 CFR 1.114

1. A request for continued examination under 37 CFR 1.114, including the fee set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(e), was filed in this application after final rejection. Since this application is eligible for continued examination under 37 CFR 1.114, and the fee set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(e) has been timely paid, the finality of the previous Office action has been withdrawn pursuant to 37 CFR 1.114. Applicant's submission filed on September 26, 2005 has been entered.

Preliminary Remarks

2. This Office action responds to the amendment and arguments filed by applicant on September 26, 2005 in reply to the previous Office action, mailed August 5, 2005.

3. The amendment of claim 1 by applicant in the reply filed September 26, 2005 is hereby acknowledged.

4. The cancellation of claims 2 and 3 by applicant in the reply filed September 26, 2005 is hereby acknowledged.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103

5. The following is a quotation of 35 U.S.C. 103(a) which forms the basis for all obviousness rejections set forth in this Office action:

(a) A patent may not be obtained though the invention is not identically disclosed or described as set forth in section 102 of this title, if the differences between the subject matter sought to be patented and the prior art are such that the subject matter as a whole would have been obvious at the time the invention was made to a person having ordinary skill in the art to which said subject matter pertains. Patentability shall not be negated by the manner in which the invention was made.

6. Claims 1 and 4-26 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over the admitted prior art, as described in the background section of the specification on pages 1 and 2.

Regarding method claims 1, 4-6, and 14, other than including the element of automation/technology, claims 1, 4-6, and 14 all read on the underlying, admitted-prior-art, manual method of maintaining an inventory record for inventory having various locations and performing a periodic manual inventory update to correct/reconcile any discrepancies in the inventory record as the accuracy of the record diminishes over time. Note that, other than for automation, all claimed features are either explicitly described by the admitted prior art, or else would necessarily, thus inherently, be performed in practicing the method described by the admitted prior art. The admitted prior art, however, does not include that any known apparatus is capable of performing, in an automated fashion, the manual methods described by the admitted prior art. However, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art, at the time of the invention, to have provided the use of apparatus such as recited in method claims 1, 4-6, and 14, since the underlying method steps/functions being performed by the apparatus are

themselves known, and because it has been held that broadly providing a mechanical or automatic means to replace manual activity which would accomplish the same result involves only routine skill in the art. *In re Venner*, 120 USPQ 192.

Regarding claim 7, the admitted prior art describes a method of reconciling a current central inventory record having counts and location assignments for a plurality of product types, as applied above in the rejection of claims 1 and 6, but the admitted prior art fails to include the steps of removing outlier values from the data; averaging the remaining data values; and, using the calculated average as the adjustment amount when the current inventory data needs to be updated/adjusted/corrected due to a discrepancy in the count of items, as determined by an updated inventory assessment, rather than simply using the oldest/earliest value and using that value without regard as to whether or not the value was obviously erroneous.

However, FIFO, LIFO, average, and weighted average are four well known, hence obvious, techniques to use in the valuation of inventory. Furthermore, excluding obviously erroneous, mis-keyed data to improve the accuracy of results when averaging data is also a well known, hence obvious, technique to use when calculating a statistical average.

Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art, at the time of the invention, to have modified the method described in the admitted prior art, so as to periodically perform necessary corrections/adjustments/uploads to inventory based on inventory valuation calculated on an average basis, rather than a FIFO basis, as is well known to do, and to exclude clearly erroneous, mis-keyed data when calculating the average, as is also well-known to do, in

order to produce an accounting of inventory that would be as accurate as possible, and since so-doing could be performed readily and easily by any person of ordinary skill in the art, with neither undue experimentation, nor risk of unexpected results.

Regarding claims 8, 9, 12, and 13, the further details of these dependent claims would all be either inherent in the described combination, or else self-evident or well known, hence obvious, to one of ordinary skill in the art, such that it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art, at the time of the invention, to have made any necessary modifications, merely as a matter of design choice, since so doing could be performed by any person of ordinary skill in the art, with neither undue experimentation, nor risk of unexpected results.

Regarding claims 10 and 11, the admitted prior art does not include making substitutions of inventory for interchangeable parts to offset a surplus of one with a shortage of another, based on a substitution table to indicate interchangeability of parts. However, storing a list of interchangeable parts in a table and making substitutions of interchangeable parts to offset a shortage of one with a surplus of another is a well known, hence obvious, technique to employ in performing an accounting of inventory. For example, if 60 Energizer AA batteries and 40 Duracell AA batteries are later determined to instead be 60 Duracells and 40 Energizers, there are still 100 AA batteries. Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art, at the time of the invention, to have further modified the method of the admitted prior art so as to provide a substitution table of interchangeable parts and make substitutions of interchangeable parts to offset a shortage of one with a surplus of another, as is well known to

do, in order to minimize the amount of adjustments being made to correct the inventory, thereby improving the accuracy, since so doing could be performed readily and easily by any person of ordinary skill in the art, with neither undue experimentation, nor risk of unexpected results.

Regarding apparatus claims 15-26, the admitted prior art does not include that any known apparatus is capable of performing, in an automated fashion, the methods described by the admitted prior art. However, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art, at the time of the invention, to have provided apparatus such as recited by claims 15-26, since the underlying method steps/functions being performed by the apparatus are themselves either known or considered obvious, as set forth in the rejections of claims 1 and 4-14 hereinabove, and because it has been held that broadly providing a mechanical or automatic means to replace manual activity which would accomplish the same result involves only routine skill in the art.

In re Venner, 120 USPQ 192.

Response to Arguments

7. Applicant's arguments filed Sept. 26, 2005 have been fully considered but are not persuasive.

8. Regarding the arguments concerning "equalizing the number of instances," etc., the functional recitations read on merely keeping an inventory record, performing a periodic check/inventory, then correcting/updating the data in the database to match what was actually found on the shelves, which process simply does not rise to the level of "patentable invention."

9. Regarding the argument that there is no suggestion to combine the references, the examiner recognizes that obviousness can only be established by combining or modifying the teachings of the prior art to produce the claimed invention where there is some teaching, suggestion, or motivation to do so found either in the references themselves or in the knowledge generally available to one of ordinary skill in the art. See *In re Fine*, 837 F.2d 1071, 5 USPQ2d 1596 (Fed. Cir. 1988) and *In re Jones*, 958 F.2d 347, 21 USPQ2d 1941 (Fed. Cir. 1992). In this case, the knowledge generally available to one of ordinary skill in the art would include having to indicate the locations of the items and accounting for the items of either a first-in, first-out, or a last-in, first-out, basis, for example.

10. Regarding the argument that the examiner's conclusion of obviousness is based upon improper hindsight reasoning, it must be recognized that any judgment on obviousness is in a sense necessarily a reconstruction based upon hindsight reasoning. But so long as it takes into account only knowledge which was within the level of ordinary skill at the time the claimed invention was made, and does not include knowledge gleaned only from the applicant's disclosure, such a reconstruction is proper. See *In re McLaughlin*, 443 F.2d 1392, 170 USPQ 209 (CCPA 1971).

Conclusion

11. The prior art made of record and not relied upon is considered pertinent to the disclosure.

12. Any inquiry concerning this communication, or earlier communications, should be directed to the examiner, **Jerry O'Connor**, whose telephone number is **(571) 272-6787**, and whose facsimile number is **(571) 273-6787**.

The examiner can normally be reached weekdays from 9:30 to 6:00.

If attempts to reach the examiner are unsuccessful, the examiner's supervisor, Mr. Alexander Kalinowski, can be reached at **(571) 272-6771**.

Official replies to this Office action may be submitted by any **one** of fax, mail, or hand delivery. **Faxed replies are preferred and should be directed to (571) 273-8300.** Mailed replies should be addressed to "Commissioner for Patents, PO Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450." Hand delivered replies should be delivered to the "Customer Service Window, Randolph Building, 401 Dulany Street, Alexandria, VA 22314."

GJOC

December 23, 2005

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jerry O'Connor". To the right of the signature is the date "12/23/05" written in a similar cursive style.

Gerald J. O'Connor
Primary Examiner
Group Art Unit 3627